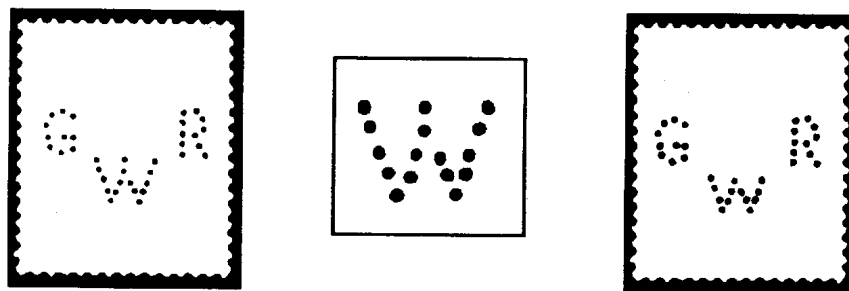


Re-construction of the early Sloper GR/W dies. Roy Gault.

In Bulletin N°. 304 (Feb 2000) I put forward the suggestion that the 'ugly' GR/W die with the 13 pin "W" was the result of modification of an earlier die with a 16 pin "W" and *finer pins*. Now that this die has been covered in the Railway Survey, I can produce the 'proof' here without over complicating the worksheets. Note: These early dies have the centre portion of the "W" forming an inverted 'Vee'.



The fineness of the original perforating pins would have greatly reduced the number of sheets of stamps that could be initialled in one operation without risking the pins buckling. I guess when Joseph Sloper made the original dies (there turns out to be at least two of them!) in 1868 he probably didn't envisage the enormous use (based on the number of surviving examples) that the Great Western Railway would make of his initialling process to protect their stamps.

To **allow more sheets to be initialled in one go**, I think Joseph Sloper, as an engineer, would have made two modifications to the dies. He would have replaced the very fine pins with ones of larger diameter to make them more stable in compression and less likely to buckle. However, this would have inevitably increased the load required from the initialling press, so to counteract this, he simply took out the three pins from the top of the 'W'. He couldn't really take out any more without completely disfiguring the letters.

Early strikes from the modified dies are still crisp, but shortly afterwards the dies seem to suffer from extreme wear and, on occasions, pins even run into each other. Towards the end they had become very 'tatty' indeed. A die that truly fell out of the ugly tree, hitting every branch on the way down!

The sample size this 'proof' is based on is the 202 *examples* of these early "GR/W" dies on Queen Victoria 1d reds (and a few 2d blues) in the Skinner - Gault 'Permanent Collection'. Amongst them are two *joined pairs* and three '*inverted*' examples, the significance of which will become apparent as the article unfolds.

After separating the early 16 pin W's from the 13 pins W's, the next task was to place the stamps in piles corresponding to their column on the printed sheet. The corner letters on the line-engraved issues make it possible for us to do this - the lower-left letter is the row, and the lower-right letter is the column.

Thus the first row reads: AA, AB, AC, ... AJ, AK, AL.
The second row reads: BA, BB, BC, ... BJ, BK, BL.
and so on until the last row: TA, TB, TC, ... TJ, TK, TL.

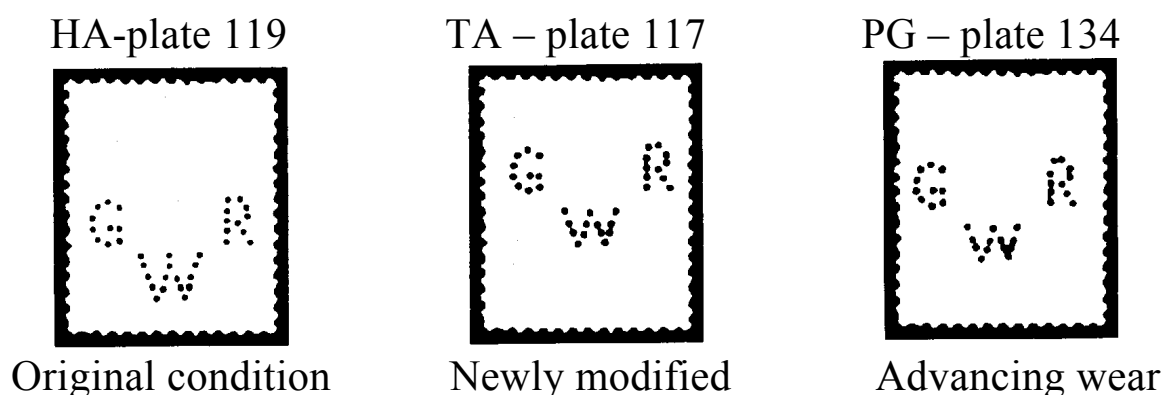
Fortunately for us, the original die(s) were somewhat non-uniform in that pins were often placed irregularly making some of the letters easily recognisable, once you've 'got your eye in' that is!

It soon became apparent that in each column there were *two* distinctly recognisable patterns, pointing to either two single row multiheaded dies, or one multiheaded die with two rows of patterns.

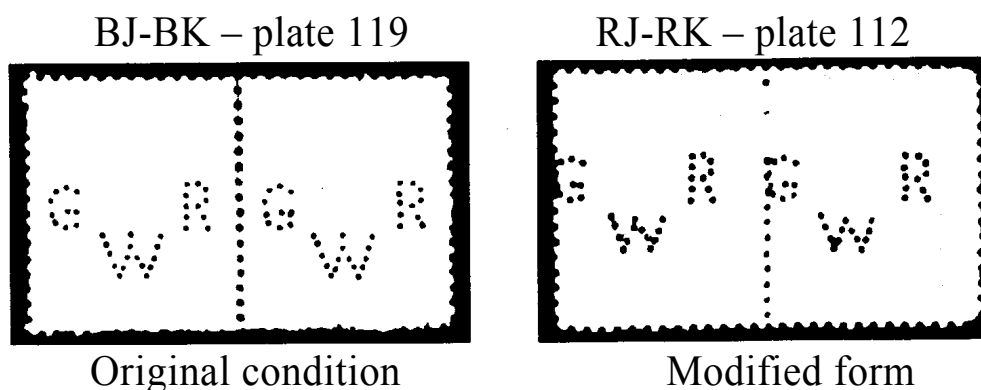
It also became apparent that a pattern was emerging whereby characteristic letters in the 'G' column (for example) were the same as the 'A' column, distinctive letters in the 'H' column were the same as the 'B' column, and so on through to the 'F' column. This could only mean one thing - that the die(s) were multi-headed with *six patterns running in a horizontal line*. But was it one multi-headed 6x2 die, or two 6x1 multi-headed dies?

A quick inspection of each of the characteristic patterns showed they could appear anywhere within their allocated column, not just the odd numbered rows, or the even numbered rows, but both. This is indicative of *two individual 6x1 multi-headed dies*. So far, so good.

The following example shows one particular pattern from one of the original dies along with examples of it in its newly modified form, and then with advancing wear showing pins starting to run into each other.



Further 'proof' comes in the form of *two joined pairs*. I reported my dated pair (Dunkeld, 18th June 1871) with the 'ugly' "W" in the original Bulletin article, but by chance Harry also had a pair showing the original 16 pin "W". More than that, both pairs had corner letters, which put them in the same 'J' and 'K' columns! Superimposing the two, they matched precisely - QED!



And there is even more 'proof, if more 'proof were needed, in the form of the three examples of the modified die showing the *perfin inverted*. These are very unusual for perfins produced on Sloper's premises, brought about by perforating upside-down sheets. The plates and corner letters involved are:

DF (plate 125), OC (plate 115), and NE (plate 115)

The individual patterns match those found in columns: A, D, and B respectively, which is entirely consistent with an inverted sheet of stamps!

To complete the reconstruction I had to find a way of separating the two 6x1 multi-headed dies. Multiples would have helped, but knowing of only two, that particular avenue was a non-starter and another method was required.

An analysis of the total number of stamps involved for each of the 12 individual patterns in two distinct conditions, shows that some of the patterns in the *modified form* had very few examples. To me this is indicative of one of the dies being used less frequently than the other. I have used this information to assign all the low volume patterns to die 'B', and the remainder to die 'A'. This puts both patterns on the pairs mentioned previously into the same die 'A' category, which is heartening!

Columns »	A & G	B & H	C & I	D & J	E & K	F & L	Totals
Original-A	5	8	8	10	12	11	54
Modified-A	9	15	8	11	12	12	67
Original-B	10	10	5	10	5	5	45
Modified-B	5	9	3	4	1	2	24
Totals	29	42	24	35	30	30	190

Note: Twelve other examples fell in the 'wrong' column.

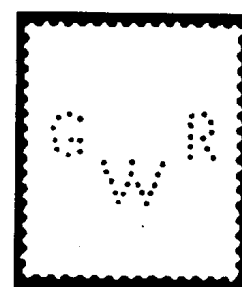
And finally, the dates and plate numbers - for simplicity, the results for both dies 'A' and 'B' have been combined.

Original condition -G4350.01aM.

Dates known: 4th March 1869.

1d Plates: 72 78 87 90 92 96 97 99 100
 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109
 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 118 119
 120 121 122 123 124 125 127 128 129
 130 « put to press June 1869.

2d plates: 9 12 13 «put to press April 1869.

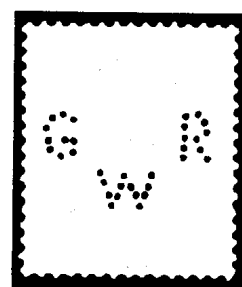


G4350.01aM

Modified condition - G4350.01M.

Dates known: 1st January 1870 - 19th October 1871.

Plates: 94 102 103 106 107 109 110 111 112
 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121
 122 123 124 125 127 129 130 131 132
 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141
 142 143 144 145 146 147 151 152 153
 154 155 « put to press April 1872.

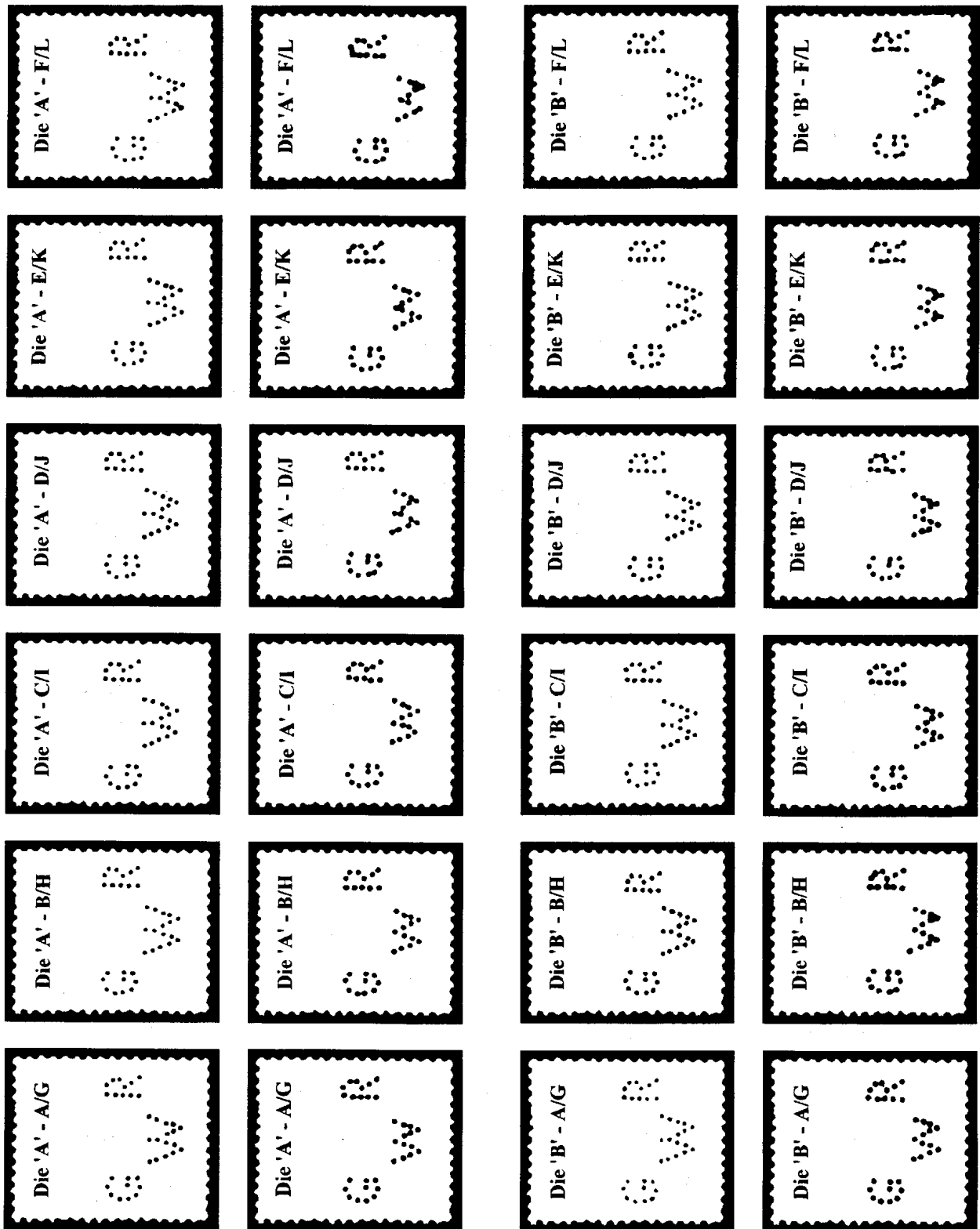


G4350.01M

The replacement die (G4350.02M) was probably made during 1871.

And now for the actual – the original dies “A” and “BD (G4350.01aM) are shown above their modified counterparts (G4350.01M)

Note: None of the scans have been ‘enhanced’.



If anyone can add any additional information, or would simply like to comment, I would be more than pleased to hear from you